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The Tornado Tree: Drawing on Stories and Storybooks

Toni E. Alpe Wood

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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December 2011

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ABSTRACT

The Tornado Tree: Drawing on Stories and Storybooks

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Storytelling has been used by many cultures to record events, research genealogy, and to teach moral lessons. Some cultures passed on their histories and important events through oral narration, papyrus, or cathedral stained glass windows. More modern cultures write personal histories, and use modern technology to communicate with each other.

This study is an arts based project based on writing a storybook. It is an exploration of why storytelling is important from a cultural point of view using my experiences to write a storybook based on a true event from my family history.

Keywords: arts based research, family history, storytelling

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Dr. Sharon Gray, Dr. Mark Graham, and Dr. Daniel T. Barney for your encouragement and support.\

Thank you to Barbra Wardle, my mentor, teacher and friend.

Thank you to my family.

Thank you Father, for all blessings.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

I grew up in the hills of Kentucky listening to what I affectionately call *bean shelling stories*. Bean shelling stories were family stories told by my mama and grandma as we sat out on the porch in the late afternoons of sultry summers in Kentucky, shelling speckled butterbeans, Crowder and black-eyed peas. Bushels of beans were shelled which my grandma would put up by canning them in Ball® and Mason® jars as part of our winter food supply. We didn't have air conditioning so the front porch was the coolest place for shelling the beans. As we sat on the porch we would hope for even a whisper of a breeze to help cool us from the heat of the day. I still remember how sore my fingers would get breaking open those bean pods. I liked shelling the speckled butterbeans the best because of the purple and white designs that nature created on each individual bean; no two were alike. I think the bean shelling stories were a way to keep us working and help us ignore the heat. We always had our favorite stories that we would ask for again and again. As I look back, those stories connected us to our family and our culture.

I believe that everyone has stories in their lives that contribute to molding them into the individuals that they will become. Whether these stories are from our ancestors, present family members or our own adventures through life, we as individuals, along with our families, come from unique cultures which are built on our life experiences. Our stories, personal and family, can help us understand where we came from and help us to determine which directions we will take in life. We can learn from and embrace our family stories, or deny our culture. If we do not like the outcomes from our personal and family stories, we learn from the past and make changes in our lives to ensure different endings for our future stories.

Tom Anderson, Art Education Professor at Florida State University and Melody K. Milbrandt, Associate Professor and Coordinator of Art Education at Georgia State University, are co-authors of the book *Art for Life* (2005). In their book they state that one of the functions of art in all world cultures is to tell our human stories and help us understand what and how we believe and who we are. Agreeing with Anderson & Milbrandt, I believe family and cultural stories need to be preserved for future generations. My mama and grandma are no longer here to keep telling bean shelling stories to the great-great grandchildren that are coming up. These generations, and future ones, need to know their heritage. They need to know about the culture that their family came from and the roots of their ancestors. Knowing about our personal culture and family background keeps us connected with our families. Learning about family stories can help knit together past, present and future generations. Telling and recording family stories and events can help teach life lessons. Hence, this study is a blending of personal culture and story which is expressed through research and creating an arts based project of writing and illustrating a storybook.

Storytelling has been used by many cultures to record events, genealogy and teach moral lessons in a society. Although we cannot be sure of their purpose, prehistoric paintings on cave walls give us a fascinating record of the earliest days of human life (Chilvers, 2008). Some cultures preserved important events through oral narration, on papyrus or cathedral stained glass windows. More contemporary cultures write personal histories, use modern technology to make movies, use the Internet, and create family blogs to communicate with each other.

I wrote and illustrated a storybook about a tree. This tree has influenced the lives of children in my family for five generations. The execution of this project presented many challenges that had to be resolved, including how to create a storyline and storyboard, what

audience the book would be written for, the physical layout of the book, the style of illustrations used, and the media used to create the illustrations. I also researched different artistic styles of storybook and graphic narrative authors and illustrators. Before creating the storybook I reviewed research literature concerning the value of storytelling in culture and education. This project serves as a model for the use of narrative in art making. The process of researching and consulting with art educators, whether personally or through text, is the methodology by which we can distill our own views and further build a knowledge base. The narrative process I have used to write and illustrate a storybook is only one way of artistic expression and not the only way in existence. Because I have personally gone through the process of writing and illustrating a storybook, I can help my students through that process. Many of the steps will be the same; however each student's work will be their individual creation. I want my students to develop their own artistic expressions.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

The review of literature validates the reasons storytelling in culture and education are important. Areas of research included in this section are: Storytelling and Culture, Stories Provide Structure for Social Interaction, Storybooks Support Multicultural Awareness, Scrapbooks Strengthen Community and Personal Values, Storytelling, Narrative, or Picture Books in Art Education, and How Stories Can Help Children Prepare for Important Life Events.

Andres Peralta (2010), PhD candidate in the Department of Art Education and Art History, University of North Texas, states in her article *The Art of Storytelling: The Co-construction of Cultural Knowledge*, that storytelling can be a unique avenue of communication. Stories can be a protective way of conveying personal expression and challenges. Through stories we can share ourselves with others; building community by coming to understand one another.

Howard Gardner (1999) is a psychologist, professor of education at Harvard University, and author of the book *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century*. He developed a theory of nine types of intelligences, which he asserts all human beings have, that reflect different ways people interact with the world. By implementing his theory in the classroom, opportunities are opened for students to find or create solutions to problems, which help them build a new knowledge base. I believe implementing storytelling in the classroom can utilize many learning styles and helps students to problem solve and build a stronger self-image by enhancing belief in their own capabilities to meet life confidently.

Charles A. Smith, PhD (1989) was a pre-school teacher at Texas Tech University and implemented reading aloud as part of his pedagogy for his students. He provided a handbook for parents to check out thematically based library books, which included family activities and life

skill topics for discussion. In 1978, at Kansas State University, Smith and his colleague Carolyn Foat re-wrote the handbook, and incorporated leadership guidelines into the program. They called it *Once Upon a Mind*. Teachers, librarians and parents used the program to show parents how to utilize stories and story time to communicate with their children concerning important events that happen in life. Anderson & Milbrandt (2005) assert that by exploring art thematically in storybooks as a manifestation and expression of life, students learn about themselves and others in relation to themselves. Such learning can foster open-mindedness and helps to cultivate a global community through students learning that they share some of the same life experiences with others. By sharing a true family story, through the creation of my storybook, I hope to provide an example of how someone can understand where they or others are in life, how to endure and overcome difficulties, and achieve personal growth.

Storytelling and Culture

Peralta (2010) states that stories are a means of expressing a personal truth or viewpoint, though its purpose may vary among different cultures. Art is one way to tell a story.

A storyteller uses a story to take the listener to a different place and time and goes beyond mere entertainment. Stories have within them the ability to relay morality, judgment, history, life lessons or cultural memories.

Like art, stories can create a place where we can begin to understand or make sense of our world. They circulate beliefs, desires, hopes and dreams and are used to explain ourselves to others and in turn help us understand one another. Stories carry with them the capacity to convey emotions and build community (Peralta, 2010, p.27).

The storyline for this thesis project came from sharing family memories through conversations with my great-aunt. Sharing family stories helped me to reconnect with my family community. The tree in the story is an exemplar of survival and is as a metaphor for enduring, overcoming challenges, and personal progress in my life. Creating my storybook recorded an important event from my family's history. This process has helped me in persevering through a rigorous educational process by looking at the tree's example of growing past difficulties that can occur in life.

Stan Koki (1998) is a program specialist for Pacific Resources for Education and Learning located in Hawaii. According to Koki, sharing personal narratives is a fundamental need for all people. The sharing of stories helps people to organize life experiences and record important life events. Sharing stories helps teachers learn about their student's personal and individual cultures. The use of narrative assists adults and children in imagining what could occur or should have taken place in a life situation, and helps them to mold and reshape their lives. The storybook created for this thesis will serve as an example in which I can share my personal culture with my students.

Stories Provide Structure for Social Interaction

Chris McKillop (2004) is a professor in the School of Computing, Gray's School of Art, and The Robert Gordon University, UK. McKillop states that stories are essential in our lives because of our need to identify with and relate to each other. They supply the structure that helps our minds categorize and recover the information needed to interact in our social communities. Stories enable community members to relate and identify with each other and can convey messages to their audience that at first may not be obvious, even to the storyteller. This thesis

project helped me to reconnect with extended members of my family. Several members of my family have told me that they could personally identify with the life lesson in the storybook.

Storybooks Support Multicultural Awareness

The use of storybooks can also support multicultural awareness in our increasingly diverse society. Bryan S. K. Kim, Department of Psychology, University of Hawaii at Hilo, and Jennifer L. Greif Green and Eileen F. Klein, Department of Counseling, Clinical and School Psychology, University of California, co-authored the article *Using Storybooks to Promote Multicultural Sensitivity in Elementary School Children* (2006). According to their research, counselors in the United States' educational system are using storybooks to help elementary students increase their social skills. By doing so, children can learn to communicate effectively, work together, resolve conflicts, and appreciate and show respect for people from different cultural backgrounds. When children come across problems in stories they are able to identify their own troubles in the story characters and gain understanding and direction.

Jane Kalfus is a first and second grade teacher at Hawes Elementary in New Jersey. Laurel Van Der Schyff teaches sixth grade in Fayetteville-Manlius school district in New York. The results of their collaborative research, recorded in their article *Storytelling* (1996), assert that in multi-age classroom environments, storytelling provides the chance for students to develop language skills and proficiency as storytellers. This community also provides a nurturing atmosphere to learn about other people and share their own lives. Multiage classrooms, like elementary settings, offer ideal conditions to build respect for diversity, understand differences, and develop self-awareness through storytelling. Because of the cultural diversity in my classroom, I believe that the implementation of writing and illustrating stories can be a useful tool to help students who are trying to learn the English language.

Scrapbooks Strengthen Community and Personal Values

Elizabeth Delacruz is an Associate Professor of Art Education and Women's Studies and Sandy Bales is a former instructor in art education at the University of Illinois. In their article *Creating History, Telling Stories, and Making Special: Portfolios, Scrapbooks, and Sketchbooks* (2010), they state that another means of telling stories is by creating scrapbooks. Scrapbooks are a way to strengthen community and personal values. People who create scrapbooks, or scrapbookers, assemble collections of photographs, ornamental and symbolic motifs, and memorabilia, and use these objects to portray shared histories of people and events. Artistically created pages and memorabilia are a form of aesthetic pleasure and indicate the importance of events and people remembered. Just as important is the sharing of the scrapbooks with family members and friends. Recording, telling, hearing, and reflecting on shared life stories may have significant effects on the lives of the creators of scrapbooks and their family relationships. The purpose of scrapbooks is for remembering. Just like Internet blogs and diaries, scrapbooks reflect the human need to record our lives and tell personal stories.

Storytelling, Narrative, or Picture Books in Art Education

Jennifer M. Fox Eades (2006) is an educator with an MS in Psychoanalytic Observation of Children and Families, and is the author of the book *Using Storytelling to Build Emotional, Social and Academic Skills across the Primary Curriculum*. According to Eades, as teachers, our profession demands that we not only teach the subject matter, but also turn out students with highly developed thinking, emotional and social skills along with academic excellence. Eades believes that using storytelling in the classroom works on numerous levels at the same time. She states:

Telling stories can contribute to all those areas at the same time. Listening to stories and telling stories can reduce stress in the classroom, promote literacy, speaking and listening skills, help children to develop thinking strategies, and promote their social and emotional development-and all while they engage in a rewarding and enjoyable activity (Eades, 2006, p. 12).

In his book *From Wonder to Wisdom*, Smith (1989) explains how to use stories and story time to explore the unchanging problems of life. According to Smith, make-believe experiences in stories can assist children in learning to face challenges by helping them explore real life topics such as friendship, change, growth, and loss. Storytelling and narrative are not just for entertainment. The use of stories gives children an opportunity to understand and express their thoughts and feelings. Studies in education have highlighted story telling as a means of teaching children's character development. Smith's study of children's storybooks has shown that the use of storybooks and storytelling can help children learn problem solving and social skills.

How Stories Can Help Children Prepare for Important Life Events

Smith (1989) believes having regular family story time, which includes storytelling and reading aloud, is important. Children learn from stories because they are powerful methods of communication. Meaningful stories activate the imagination by showing how the characters make choices, solve problems and experience the effects of their actions. Stories have always existed in human history. Throughout history, medicine men, poets, and wise elders have used stories to instruct, restore health, and entertain. Smith thinks that in order for a story to be helpful it must entertain, not through common sense, but by using feelings and intuition in order to get in touch with a child's mind.

According to Smith (1989), each of us constructs individual narratives which depict our past, present and future. Our stories have three elements: *experiences*, *concepts*, and *themes*. Experiences deal with the realities in our lives. Concepts are the thoughts we have about self and others which we use to understand and examine experiences and that direct our actions. Themes are abstract beliefs that act as models to help us sort out personal stories into a logical meaningful whole that gives unity to our personal stories. Smith explains that stories can have both *surface meaning* and *deep meaning*. Surface meaning is the clear storyline or meaning in a story. Deep meaning is the less apparent meaning in a story that touches the unconscious inner thoughts and ideas of one's individual story. Although I did not initially plan it, the way the story evolved, as I wrote and rewrote it, portrayed a meaningful message as I tried to make sense of several of life's challenges involving my family and me, in the past and present.

After extensive research, examining thousands of children's storybooks over a span of seventeen years, Smith (1989) found eight key themes which affect children's self-worth and their relationships. They are: 1) *setting goals*, 2) *courageously facing challenges*, 3) *developing closer relationships*, 4) *dealing with loss and mourning*, 5) *being compassionate to others*, 6) *maintaining an openness with people*, 7) *learning to problem solve in social situations*, and 8) *developing positive self-worth*. Smith believes stories which connect with a child's moral imagination could consist of one or several of these eight themes. I will further articulate the eight themes and elaborate on particular concepts that relate to each theme.

Setting goals

Setting goals contributes to having a purpose and is important in pursuing one's dreams. Through setting goals the use of the imagination is used to envision the future. Having individual goals helps children not to give up in spite of the disappointments and problems they may

encounter in their lives. Setting goals and committing to actions will help children to follow their dreams.

Stories can help children understand that life can have meaning and everyone can have dreams to guide their actions to reach individual goals. Along the road to reaching those goals they will encounter setbacks and problems. When children work to persevere and overcome these problems it can make them stronger individuals.

Courageously facing challenges

Courageously facing challenges is about rising above fear and learning to act with determination. At times fears are produced by our imagination and we must deal with those fears. Children can learn that sometimes things that seem intimidating may not be dangerous in reality. Also, they can learn to recognize that other people feel afraid at times in their lives, and that helping someone else can help them to conquer some of their own fears.

Children look to parents for direction and strength. Parents want to protect their children from all danger and disappointment. But, if they were to do so they would take from them the ability to grow, to develop courage and strength of character. Every individual has a choice to react to life either as a victim, or face hardships with hope and fortitude. Parents can encourage and support them, but it will be up to the individual to decide how their life turns out. The stories that we share with children, that reflect what is in our hearts, will linger with them long after we are gone. And, when the hardships come in their lives they can reflect on those messages and find the courage to keep going.

Developing closer relationships

Developing closer relationships occurs through the cultivation of associations with others. In order to cultivate relationships and friendships children need to learn to reach out to others.

They must also learn that their friends can like other people and still care about them because it shows that one can like someone else without taking away from relations with others. Two other aspects of developing close relations with others are realizing that they belong to a family unit that loves and looks after them, and that love means showing someone that they care about them.

Reading stories about fantasies can give our lives direction because they help to build the dreams that are part of our individual stories. However, we cannot live in a fantasy. So we should read and tell stories to children that describe examples of give-and-take communication. These kinds of stories can show how to use problem solving skills to overcome conflicts in friendships and family relationships.

Dealing with loss and mourning

Dealing with loss and mourning means to cope with unavoidable loss. Everyone has times in their lives when they experience sadness. Everyone feels sad when they are separated from someone they love. Children must learn that death is an unavoidable part of life and is permanent. Helping children to remember happy times of someone they love honors their relationship with them and can provide comfort. Funerals present a chance to say farewell to a loved one.

Pretending there is no end to life, not death itself, is what diminishes the quality of life. Information, emotional expression, tenderness, and remembering happy times, are key elements that can help children handle loss. Stories can offer children information about the events surrounding a loss. They show how the story characters express deep feelings of sadness while they progressively make their recovery from their loss. This can help children express their fears and understand that they are not alone in their feelings. Story time can be a special time of

tenderness which can encourage reminiscing. It can also be a time to honestly acknowledge and examine the pain and concern that is associated with death.

Being compassionate to others

Being compassionate to others helps children to learn to develop selfless skills such as kindness, sharing, helping and generosity. Children can learn compassion by caring for someone who is hurt or ill, comforting someone in distress, or rescuing or protecting someone from harm. They can show charity by giving and sharing with others.

Kindness means getting involved and becoming accountable for taking action to help another person. However, sometimes becoming too involved can lead to conflict. Because of this children need to be cautioned to 1) be generous but don't give away too much, 2) do not do anything dangerous to protect someone, 3) be helpful but not bossy, and 4) be friendly but be cautious about speaking to strangers. Two of the factors that influence children when it comes to making the decision to become involved are previous situations they have observed and how they have been treated personally in the past. Stories can help create a culture of compassion that emphasizes respect for life.

Maintaining openness with people

Maintaining openness with people emphasizes being aware of the world around you by using all of your senses and being honest. People have different opinions about truth and children need to become aware that people may try to deceive them. They must come to understand that lying tears down trust between people. Finding out the facts can determine the truth in a given situation. Also, there will be times when they tell the truth and some people will not believe them.

We want children to grow and become trustworthy and honest individuals. Teaching them to be honest goes beyond telling the truth. They need to learn to communicate feelings and thoughts clearly, in a sensitive and compassionate manner. Being open to the world means going past superficiality and recognizing what lies behind appearances, because looks can be deceiving. To do this, children must trust their own instincts and feelings.

Learning to solve problems in social situations

Learning to solve problems in social situations shows an understanding of possible consequences and recognizing potential solutions. Because the actions of self and others are linked together, children must learn to think about the consequences of their actions. They must also learn to recognize alternative answers to solve problems in social situations.

Children learn about consequences through their individual experiences, making links between their actions and the response to their actions from others. Using stories to establish sound ethical and moral foundations is a long process. But a foundation built through words and examples will carry on long after the direct influence of parents has passed.

Developing positive self-worth

Developing positive self-worth refers to our thoughts and feelings about us as individuals. Children need to learn that they are people full of energy and life and are special because they have a unique way of interacting with the world. Because they are individuals, they have a body that is just right for them.

According to Smith (1989), our lives are not measured by material things or the number of friends we have, because they are fleeting; but are measured by our character. What we truly have is what we see when we look in the mirror. Finding happiness starts with coming to terms with our individuality, and learning to recognize the things that really count in life. Stories, and

storytelling, give us the opportunity to convey these and other important principles for living to the children we love.

Considerations for Story Time

When considering story time, Smith (1989) has found that children want to be with someone who cares about them and will take the time to go with them on their imagination journey. Children do not want to be lectured. Talking teddy bears, stories recorded on tape recorders and television are lifeless in contrast to the comfort, sharing and trust built with their storyteller. According to C. S. Lewis, famous educator and novelist, for adults to enjoy story time depends on freeing the childlike part of ourselves (as cited in Smith, 1989, pg. 26). It can be a time of revealing our personal emotions and values. This is dependent on our readiness to reveal the inner parts of ourselves that are touched when sharing a story.

Considerations for Choosing a Story

Deciding on a story is a personal decision. Smith (1989) suggests the following considerations when choosing a story to share with a child: 1) theme, 2) illustrations, and 3) text. Consider the theme or subject matter and how the child might relate to it. Factors such as our individual values, background and personal preference will determine how we interpret the child's needs. Review the quality of the illustrations to see if they create a feeling and mood that complements the subject matter of the book. Evaluate the complexity and writing style of the text. The vocabulary should be age appropriate, keeping in mind that some unknown words are good because learning new words helps to build a child's vocabulary. Also, the length of the story should be appropriate for the child's age.

Bobby & Sherry Norfolk (1999) are the co-authors of the book *The Moral of the Story: Folktales for Character Development*. Bobby is a three time Emmy Award winner for his use of

storytelling to solve problems in his weekly television show *Gator Tales*. Sherry is an elementary school teacher with more than twenty years experience and a children's librarian. Their book is for anyone who is interested in using storytelling as a means to educate youth about values and ethics. They believe if we want children to listen to, know, and implement moral principles in their lives that it is better taught through storytelling, and not by preaching facts. When stories show repeatedly how character traits of determination, honesty, kindness, creativity and humor can be rewarded, we encourage youth to adopt these qualities. Bobby Norfolk states, "If we want children to hear and understand and practice the truth about the moral way to behave, then we need to tell stories, not preach truth!" (Norfolk, 1999, p.15).

Grace M. Deniston-Trochta, an art educator at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, states in an article she wrote entitled *The Meaning of Storytelling as Pedagogy* (2005), that one role of teachers is to help students find the connection between internal and external knowledge in the great store of information they have accumulated about their world. In this we can help them understand how this information relates to the subject matter in the community of the classroom. As teachers, we do this when we share with our students what we perceive is beautiful, true, and meaningful. We must value and listen to our students' experiences in the same manner. We must also be aware of how our students process our ideas about what is meaningful, true, and beautiful. When we implement this way of interacting with our students in our classrooms, our role provides an example of a listener and learner model. This model stresses the importance of respecting and recognizing many types of aesthetic encounters. We need to provide our students the opportunity to also be storytellers and reciprocally teach both ourselves and other students. "It requires reckoning with teaching as storytelling, in which both teacher and student engage. It acknowledges the importance of autobiography and interactive journaling in the education

process” (Deniston-Trochta, 2003, p. 107). My research for this thesis correlates with Deniston-Trochta’s statement. I have used a family story and written and illustrated a storybook to share a meaningful experience with my students. My students can use this process as a guide as they write and illustrate an experience, either real or imaginative, as personal artistic expression. Sharing the results of their endeavors with each other can help knit a culturally diverse community.

There is also a growing interest in telling stories in academic discourse, such as historiography, autoethnography in the field of anthropology, communications, qualitative research and media studies. The autobiographical and creative self-expression in these narrative forms enlightens and informs their intended audience (Delacruz & Bales, 2010).

Community Based Education and Family History in Art Education

Angela M. La Porte (2000), Assistant Professor of Art Education at the University of Arkansas, in her article *Oral History as Intergenerational Dialogue in Art Education*, states that oral histories or stories, obtained from interviewing older adults, can be an important asset in art education. Not long ago, older family members and grandparents contributed a more significant role in the daily lives of children. These relationships have eroded over the past several decades. By interviewing older family members, they can relate experiences from their lives that can re-establish a link with the past. Their interpretation of art and local history acts as a personal authentication of past times and events.

Julie Alsip Bucknan (2001), an educator of art, curriculum and instruction at Eastern Kentucky University, believes students must understand themselves as individuals, as members of a family, neighborhood, state, country, and humanity, before understanding the similarities and differences among members of society.

Rita Buchoff teaches student teachers at the University of Central Florida. In her article *Family Stories* (1995), she states that family stories encourage students to learn more about personal heritage, hone and improve literacy skills, and foster greater respect for their unique multicultural diversity. Bob Barton has been an elementary and secondary teacher, Education Officer and an Arts Coordinator with the Ontario Ministry of Education, professional storyteller, and an author of children's books. He has also received numerous arts and literacy awards.

According to Barton:

Family stories provide students with opportunities for personal growth as well as memorable experiences. With the assistance of parents or other adults, significant moments, people, or places from the past can be vicariously recaptured. There are important stories for promoting the values of the home, neighborhood, and community and can be viewed as a gift that one generation bestows upon another (as cited in Buchoff, 1995).

Gilbert Clark (2000), Emeritus of Art Education at Indiana University and Enid Zimmerman, Professor and Coordinator of Art Education and Gifted and Talented Education at Indiana University address Project ARTS in their article *Greater Understanding of the Local Community: A Community-Based Art Education Program for Rural Schools*. Project ARTS was an investigative and developmental program created for students attending seven rural elementary schools in the United States. It was directed toward students who had interest and talent in performing and visual arts. The students came from different ethnic and economically underprivileged backgrounds. The program's emphasis was for students to study and record their local community's arts, cultures, histories, and to pay homage to local values, conditions, and traditions in arts and crafts.

Project ARTS staff emphasized multi-ethnic approaches to teaching by helping students understand and appreciate art objects found in local folk arts and crafts, popular art, women's art, and native art. The theme adopted by all of the participating schools was the development of a greater understanding of the local community. Members of the various communities came forward to offer assistance, including local historians, artists, parents and family of students, interested community members and professional and amateur crafts persons. In their article they state:

Studying local arts and crafts, musical and oral tradition, the skills of local artists and artisans and other aspects of their local communities often help rural students attain greater awareness and valuing of personal resources, and develop self-confidence and self-esteem. Emphasis on the study of local communities was an obvious step toward the attainment of such goals and also had potential to act as a conduit for further study for arts in other cultures, past and present (Clark & Zimmerman, 2000, p. 35).

The teachers from all of the schools involved in the program exchanged the lesson plans they developed, students' artworks, communication, assessment criteria, video tapes made by the students about their communities and schools, pen-pal correspondence, local cookbooks and other resources.

Examples of student projects included creating a local history story quilt, documentation of local places and people in their community using photography, exploring local history by interviewing grandparents, recording family recipes, and using the recipes to create an illustrated cookbook. At one school in Indiana, students focused on local architecture and used photography

to document buildings. They built models of selected homes and presented a public exhibit of their study.

All schools, teachers and students benefited from the new relationships with their communities. “Parents and community members have seen their history and culture validated and have been encouraged by the excitement and interest shown by students from their own backgrounds” (Clark & Zimmerman, 2000, p. 35).

Writing and illustrating a storybook to explore personal culture can help students connect with family and share their history and culture with others. The sharing of personal culture can foster self-confidence and self-worth and help build community.

Storytelling and Artmaking

Many children who live outside of metropolitan areas do not have opportunities to visit art museums and galleries. Judith V. Lechner (1993), Assistant Professor, Children’s Literature and Media at Auburn University, in her article *Picture Books as Portable Art Galleries*, asserts that children still have access to portable art in the form of picture books. Through exposure to picture books, children can learn about visual arts vocabulary and the wide range of artistic styles used to create the illustrations for stories. This can improve their understanding of the challenges that artists face in the creation of their work. Writing the storyline and creating the illustrations for a storybook for this thesis has improved my understanding of the many processes and challenges that are involved in this type of artistic endeavor. Students can also improve their understanding of the challenges artists face by going through these same creative processes.

Paula Eubanks (1999) is an art educator at Georgia State University. In an article she wrote entitled *Understanding Picture Books as an Art Medium*, Eubanks states that books have been considered art objects since the illustrated manuscripts of the Middle Ages. Recently, book arts

have grown in reputation and gained recognition with the craftsmanship and creativity of book artists. Mass-produced picture books are a less expensive alternative to costly hand made private press books, but these books should not be considered substitutes for the former. Picture books are also works of art. They also show the basic structural form of books. As students explore characteristics of picture books as works of art, they can gain basic knowledge that will help them explore books as an art form.

Sipe (2001) also says that storytelling is a good way to engage students in learning about artwork and the process of artmaking. Storytelling is different from other ways of knowing or telling because contact with the visual arts can help children to develop cognitive and other skills. Using storybooks that contain famous art works, or parodies of famous art, can help do away with inhibitions about interacting with art. These types of storybooks invite a playful response to art and help children to feel uninhibited as they learn to critique art. Because they feel free to critique art, they can explore the positive and negative aspects of society reflected in a culture's artworks. Sipe states:

Educators have long argued that experience with the arts in general (and with the visual arts in particular) is an important part of children's cognitive, emotional and social development (Cianciolo, 1994; Eisner, 1999; Gardner, 1982; Greene, 1995); and senior literacy researchers have called for a broadening of the lens of literacy to include visual aspects of picturebooks (Flood & Lapp, 1995). Art is a way of seeing, a way of knowing and a way of feeling. The first step towards a more just and equitable society is to imagine what it would be like. The imagination developed by viewing and talking about art, is the gateway to a broader

and deeper understanding of what it means to be human (as cited in Sipe, 2001, p. 209).

The first exposure many children have to serious art is through picture books. Illustrated storybooks can be used to introduce schools of art, specific styles of art and artists. Children can also learn about the elements of art (composition, line, shape and form, space, color and texture), and design principles (balance, proportion, rhythm, emphasis, unity). The physical structure plays a part in our overall perception of storybooks. Placement and size of text and illustrations, as well as book size, are also considerations. All of these facets contribute to experiencing a storybook as a whole aesthetic experience.

Norma J. Livo and Sandra A. Rietz (1986) are storytellers. In their book *Storytelling Process and Practice* they claim that storytelling can be different from other ways of knowing and telling in many diverse ways and levels. Children can use stories as a structure for organizing and understanding information or events. The methodology of storytelling can enable children to grow and develop in many ways. Storytelling is an immediate occurrence and is dependent on the makeup of the audience. The same story will be told in each individual situation, to each audience, in a way that reflects the audience's needs. The National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling (NAPPS) gives this definition of storytelling:

Storytelling is an art form through which a storyteller projects mental and emotional images to an audience using the spoken word, including sign language and gestures, carefully matching story content with audience needs and environment. The story sources reflect all literatures and cultures, fiction and nonfiction, for educational, recreational, historic,

folkloric, entertainment and therapeutic purposes (Yarnspinner, 8) (as cited in Livo & Rietz, 1986, p. 7).

Another characteristic of storybooks or graphic narratives is their capacity for the reader to read them again and again, and develop different interpretations as their own understanding and knowledge levels grow.

Eades (2006) states that all too often both teacher and students are not able to express their feelings, desires, or needs through ordinary methods. It is often difficult to express fears, emotions and personal information to others. Through the use of storytelling and graphic narrative, these concepts can be transferred through a character, story, or artwork which provides other channels of communication between students and others. Teachers can often gain insights from student created stories or artwork in order to know how to understand their students' needs and challenges. By offering a choice of different media for students to use to create their storybook, students can choose a medium that is personally suitable and rewarding. Students can also use fictitious characters instead of real people to tell stories or express feelings.

Story Time in the Classroom

In the classroom, storytelling can work on numerous levels. Story time is an enjoyable and worthwhile activity for all school ages. Telling stories can help develop listening, speaking, and literacy skills. It can also increase reasoning strategies, stimulate classroom discussion, help support emotional and social development, and build social awareness (Eades, 2006).

Cyndi Giorgis is an Assistant Professor at the University of Nevada and is the author of the article *The Power of Reading Picture Books Aloud to Secondary Students*. She states that in a survey of secondary students, teachers confirmed that more than two-thirds of the students interviewed were read to before they started school. More than half were read to in first and

second grades. For most of the students the practice stopped by third grade. “Teachers who did read aloud during grades four to six and into middle and high school, however, made significant, positive, and long-lasting impressions on their students” (as cited in Giorgis, 1999, p. 51).

Differences between Traditional and Postmodern Picture Books

Pamela Hellman (2003) is an independent art educator living in Keller, Texas. In her article *The Role of Postmodern Picture Books in Art Education*, she states that picture books are a visual art form in which both illustrations and text are utilized to tell a story. Hellman also addresses the differences between traditional and postmodern picture books.

Traditional picture books

- The text and illustrations move linear left to right
- Illustrations are imaginative and focused
- The text structure reflects oral tradition
- The story is naive in tone
- Appealing characters overcome a conflict and return home in safety

Postmodern picture books

- Page movement is not linear in pattern
- The story is sarcastic or cynical in tone
- The story is polysemic, or has many meanings, and therefore requires the reader to be interactive and make choices about what information to read and use in the book
- The storyline is vague
- Text and illustrations are humorous and may include puns or jokes
- Use of self-referential text, in which the narrator or characters use the physical pages of the book for props or to describe how the book was created

Bette P. Goldstone (2001), author of the article *Whaz up with our Books? Changing Picture Book Codes and Teaching Implications* is a teacher at Arcadia University. She asserts that even though postmodern picture book features are characteristic of the present, they still remain true to the time-honored definition of a picture books make-up, which is the interaction of text and

illustrations. In comparing these two approaches, it is evident that what is different about postmodern picture books is how they are organized. Neither style is superior to the other. Rather, the boundaries of what makes a successful storybook are expanding, as well as how stories are being told. Postmodern storybooks relate to *hypertext*, a non-consecutive computer text found on instructional software, computer games, and most Internet web sites. These storybooks reflect the computer byte information culture in which today's youth are growing up.

Giorgis (1999) states that picture book illustrations today are outstanding artwork and they appeal to adolescents because of the complexity and detail in the work. As society becomes more visually oriented, one way that high school students can gain a better knowledge of contemporary artistic processes and styles is by reading and looking at picture books (See Appendix).

Chapter 3

Methods

History of Arts Based Research

Arts based research was launched at Stanford University by Elliot Eisner (Barone and Eisner, 2012), Emeritus Professor of Art and Education at the Stanford University School of Education. He is active in several fields including Arts Education, Curriculum Reform, and Qualitative Research. In 1993, after obtaining support from the American Education Research Association, Dr. Eisner conducted the first Arts based research institute. Directed toward university intellectuals and school professionals, the institute was constructed to help them become aware of what research directed by aesthetic characteristics could entail. He invited his former doctoral student, Tom Barone (Barone and Eisner, 2012), Professor of Education in the Arizona State University Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College in the area of Curriculum Studies and Qualitative Research Methods, to be one of the instructors. Eisner and Barone co-directed a total of eight arts based research institutes over a twelve year period.

What is Arts Based Research?

According to Barone and Eisner (2012), *arts based research* is an attempt to explore potential representation derived from aesthetic consideration which, in its highest expression, results in the creation of a product resembling an artwork. They suggest that themes of meaning are formed, being added to or are limited, by the tools we use. Their ambition is to open the possibilities of what tools can be used to define the world, and also to recognize and broaden the area that defines the meaning of research. Most importantly, according to Barone and Eisner, arts based research does not lead to assumptions about situations but tries to create insight, and when those insights are applied, to understand what has been addressed in said research. Another

reason the arts are important in promoting understanding is that they serve as an indicator that variety in methodology is possible. Arts based research uses art as the basis to create expressive artifacts that inform (Barone and Eisner, 2012). Some of the examples of media that have relevance for research are film, video, and various forms of digital and electronic imagery, which are new means of creating and generating new concepts for research. These new modes of creation make available new ways of how one can address the world. “There is an intimate connection between technology and expressivity, and we are certain that in the future the possibilities of the computer and other electronic devices will be exploited in ways that are even more daring than they have been thus far” (Barone and Eisner, 2012, p. 5). Arts based research emphasizes constructing a way of thinking that identifies with person, place or circumstances. It is not simply a quantitative discovery of a range of variables, but the mindful quest of meaningful form in the advancement of understanding.

The research conducted for this thesis can be considered postmodern in that it addresses variety in methodology by blending traditional and modern art media. By combining original black and white film photographs, digitally manipulated photographs, and painting with watercolor, I have tried a different way of blending old and new artistic methods.

Engaging in Artmaking as Research

The processes of investigating, writing and illustrating a children’s storybook can be considered a legitimate form of research. This form of research is complementary in its methods of investigation to that of the social sciences. Graeme Sullivan is director of the School of Visual Arts at Pennsylvania State University. In his book, *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Art* (2005), he states that the academic, cultural, and societal importance of art is significantly undervalued. Arts based research comprises the same rigor or sound academic set

of guidelines of research practice and methodical inquiry as that of the social sciences. Methodical inquiry in the area of the social sciences incorporates a set of specific practices, procedures, and rules that use research to show if a theory is valid or invalid. This approach to research can narrow possibilities and thus result in definitive answers. In addition to academic and methodical inquiry, arts based research also allows the freedom of intellect and imagination in building knowledge differently from the social sciences by having the power to change human perception by considering the part imagination and reasoning plays in building knowledge. It is the doing of an art project first hand, working through all of the steps or the methodical problem-solving to make it become a successful endeavor that makes it a rigorous inquiry. Working through the steps to find solutions, for both the research and creation of the storybook for this study, was a project that required thorough investigation.

Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor is an Associate Professor in Language and Literacy Education and Richard Siegesmund is an Associate Professor of Art and Co-chair of Art Education at the University of Georgia. They co-authored a book entitled *Arts-Based Research in Education: Foundations for Practice* (2008), in which they affirm that in the past few decades, postmodern approaches to educational research have gained more acceptance in the world of academia. Postmodern approaches in research embrace diversity and include combining techniques, materials, or mixing styles from one or more research methods. Various new qualitative research methods have attained widespread use and recognition. The means employed for data collection and displaying findings now include artistic as well as established qualitative and quantitative processes. These practices include the use of visual images, music, poetry, and other art forms. Arts based research offers increased means for creating knowledge. It generates a blend of gathering, evaluating, presenting data, and provides different ways of knowing or understanding.

The blending of scientific research, investigating how to create a storybook, and mixing of techniques, materials, and styles from traditional black and white photography, watercolor, and the more modern media of computer graphics for this thesis can be considered Postmodern in approach.

There are many ways that art has become integrated into educational research studies. The following examples are areas of arts based research and how they are used.

Hybrid forms

Hybrid forms of arts based research include “scholARTistry”. ScholARTistry, has three primary goals. Those goals are: 1) make the skill and clarity in educational writing a respected endeavor, 2) raise the level of the arts in academic research to a genuine study, and 3) infuse creativity with scholarship (Cahnmann-Taylor and Siegesmund, 2008, p.9).

Cahnmann-Taylor and Siegesmund (2008) further state that the blurred genres, or hybrid forms, which combine different research methods, share similar objectives. For example, they incorporate means from both science and art to create new insights from data that can be used during and after research. Finding new views and questions takes priority over finding answers with absolute educational conclusions. In this form of study, the researcher is the key for the documentation and analysis of data from a participant or a specific perspective. This provides personal enlightenment for the researcher. Also, blurred genres reach out and engage in real dialogue with diverse audiences in and out of the academy using available language, aesthetic speech and images.

Art for scholarship’s sake

Art for scholarship’s sake goes beyond the hybrid blending of the genres of scientific and artistic research forms of art. Creators in this method of research usually have years of training in

their specific art form (for example, writing short stories and poetry, dance, and painting) as well as other areas of the arts, and are used in data gathering and investigation. The aim of art for scholarship's sake is, through research, to infuse art with meaning in a social context and permeate socially engaging research with art. Educational research journals have increasingly published non-traditional creative reflections from fieldwork whose formats include music, photography, video, multimedia, poetry readings, and art exhibits. This type of educational research is memorable because it shares results of inquiry that is emotive and has intuitive impact.

Graeme Sullivan (2010) suggests using narrative as one form of research. Narrative is an account of a series of events or ideas, either factual or fiction, which can also incorporate pictures. He states that narrative is powerful and personal, and, because most societies use storytelling, it's a form of art we can relate to. The narrative used for the storybook for this thesis project was factual, and through the process of creating the storybook it became a personally intuitive creation. The project became a cathartic process because it helped me to work through challenges presented in pursuing this thesis project. Art as therapy, using storytelling and painting, can be a means of communicating feelings and experiences.

Art as therapy

Harriet Wadeson, PhD, LCSW, ATR-BC, HLM, founded the Art Therapy Graduate Program at the University of Illinois at Chicago and currently teaches at Northwestern University, where she also established the Art Therapy Certificate Program. In her book *Art Psychotherapy* (1980), she states that art therapy is the use of an art medium, such as drawing, painting, sculpting, storytelling, or play therapy, to communicate feelings, emotions, or experiences. Through a trained art therapist, it can also be used as treatment for people who are

physically handicapped or have emotional or mental illnesses. The use of art therapy builds better communication and coping skills. In educational settings, art therapy helps children in the classroom learn to express themselves in a creative manner, or to express emotions of disagreement, frustration, anger, and resentment in a safe environment. Art therapy today has grown out of the recent psychiatric movement from Freud and Jung, pioneers in psychotherapy, both of whom placed great importance on symbolization in which real images can stand in for inexpressible images (Wadeson, 1980, p.13).

Three ways to use art as therapy are use of imagery, storytelling, and drawing and painting.

Use of imagery

One of the advantages of art therapy is that people think in images. Because images are one of the first preverbal forms of thinking, they play a significant part of individual trait formation of the personality. Images are the first experiences that influence later layers of an individual's personality (Wadeson, 1980, p.8).

Storytelling

Storytelling is an effective art therapy tool because it encourages patients to want change.

The following are examples of using storytelling in art therapy.

1. Hearing family stories helps to get to know clients and their unique experiences in life.
2. Clients tell stories in specific areas, such as money, betrayal, trust or relationships between individuals.
3. Using the imagination to produce hypothetical, symbolic, or fantasy stories that represent some of the issues clients are dealing with, but using fictional people, animals and make-believe lands (Synder, 1997, p.8).

Drawing and painting

Drawing and painting are ways that a patient can make visible important information from the unconscious. These symbols from the psyche strive for balance and completeness and have a healing influence. Images that emerge from the unconscious transmit psychic information, which will help bring the client to a greater state of awareness, which helps with the healing process. The conscious and unconscious exchange unencumbers interaction and communication (Furth, 1988, p.1, 7, 12-13).

Shaun McNiff (1998) defines research as a method of inquiry dedicated to building new knowledge. He proposes identifying models of research by looking at practices within the art therapy discipline as an alternative to going outside the discipline to discover how to do research. He further asserts that the experience generated by the practice of creative arts therapy offers the possibility of closing the space that divides research and practice in the field.

Issues of Engaging in Artmaking as Research

Cahnmann-Taylor and Siegesmund (2008) say that the level of professional and individual risk involved in artmaking as research has been implied but rarely recognized. Any degree of success in the field has often been accomplished through happenstance instead of conscious development. As a result, there is little in the way of precise training for researchers to practice methods of investigation which embrace tools and a specific course of action that include both the arts and the sciences. Because a critical community is not in place, there are few criteria to distinguish the difference between quality and amateur arts based research. An important concern for educational arts based research is to make the practices and results of artmaking as research genuine to researchers, educators, and others. Consequently, more researchers need to

conduct tests using art for scholarship's sake and hybrid forms to keep fine-tuning our critical awareness.

As a researcher, I believe the completion of gathering the data and creating the art project for this thesis further supports the legitimacy of undertaking art as research.

Possibilities for the Future of Arts based Research

Cahnmann-Taylor and Siegesmund (2008) state that one aspect of the value of arts based research is through the researcher's creative thought processes, the exchange of those processes and the resulting products, in order to open up a larger audience than a normal educational study. The result is immediate and has a lasting impact. As educators and researchers, we must assume that our audience wants innovative language and images to portray the emotional and rational knowledge attained through scholarly research that goes beyond data not contained in the context of language education. Exploring arts based research methods and the arts can bring richness, significance, joy and impact to our vocation. The audiences for this thesis project encompass not only the world of college academia, but will also extend back to my classroom to the students I teach, and on a more personal note, to my family. This thesis project has been a rich undertaking, important to me both professionally and personally.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

An arts based project of writing and illustrating a storybook can be challenging in many ways, enlightening, process driven, and result oriented. The subject matter of the story holds familial emotional ties that made undertaking the research a personally worthwhile project. Learning new skills and processes about how to write and illustrate a storybook could transfer into my profession as an art teacher. The process of writing and illustrating the storybook involved a personal cultural study to gather the data to write about a specific event in the history of my family and the resulting consequences of that event. To make it a richer undertaking, visual elements, in the form of illustrations, using various techniques to create them, were incorporated with the storyline. The storybook for this thesis is an example of postmodern arts based research in that it mixed several methods of research, blurring genres of photography, computer graphic design and watercolor painting. Writing and illustrating a storybook as research, more specifically arts based research, is valuable in the fact that this research can be emulated by other educators and researchers. I used original photographs, manipulated photographs using computer graphic programs, and watercolor to create the illustrations. I then scanned them back into the computer. The physical layout for the book was completed on the computer. The end result was the creation of a storybook. These methods can be taken back to the classroom and implemented by students. The process of students using a life event or story can create personal involvement and take skill building and the creative process of artmaking to another level of learning.

Going through these processes has created a knowledge base that I can implement into my teaching. I plan to take the processes I learned back to my graphic design class and create a

lesson unit in which my students can write a story about a life event, family story, or imaginative event, and illustrate it. This thesis is an example of arts based research in that it has resulted in an open-ended investigation of many possibilities for using storytelling and storybooks in the classroom. It blurs the lines of what media can be used to create art. Also, it incorporates the linear steps of scientific methodology as a structure to follow as guidelines for working through processes, learning the skills and techniques of writing and illustrating to create a storybook. The methods and processes can yield endless variations of style and interpretation. The outcomes of creating and illustrating a storybook can reflect individual students' thinking and artistic processes. Learning the skills and techniques to create a storybook can help students' skill-build, but not impede individual creativity. The arts based research for this thesis was not a process where there was a definitive result or interpretation, but a means to open avenues of transformative discovery, both educationally and personally.

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Appendix

Picture Books by Theme

The following is a list of storybooks categorized by theme.

Art History and Artists:

Artist in Overalls: The Life of Grant Wood (1995) by John Duggleby
Grandma Moses (2004) by Alexandra Wallner
Grant Wood The Artist in the Hayloft (2005) by Deba Foxley Leach
Picasso and the Girl With a Pony Tail (1998) by Laurence Anholt
The Art Lesson (1989) by Tomie dePaola
The Child's Gift of Art (collection series of four books individually titled: *Leonardo and the Flying Boy*, *Degas and the Little Dancer*, *Picasso and the Girl With a Ponytail*, and *Camille and the Sunflowers*) (2002) by Laurence Anholt
The Life and Work of Henry Moore (1999) by Sean Connolly
The Life and Work of Paul Klee (2000) by Sean Connolly

Museum:

Barbar's Museum of Art (2003) by Laurent de Brunhoff
Museum Trip (2006) by Barbara Lehman
Seen Art? (2005) written by Jon Scieszka, illustrations by Lane Smith
You Can't Take a Balloon Into The Metropolitan Museum (1998) by Jacqueline Preiss Weitzman and Robin Preiss Glasser

Parody:

Arty Cats (1999) written by David Baird, illustrations by Vicky Cox
Arty Dogs (1999) written by David Baird, illustrations by Maurice Broughton
Sitting Ducks (1998) by Michael Bedard
When Pigasso met Mootisse (1998) by Nina Laden

Setting Goals:

Scruffy the Tugboat (1946) by Gertrude Crampton
Oh, the Places you'll Go! (1990) by Dr. Seuss

Overcoming fears:

The Little Engine That Could (1930) by Watty Piper
Where the Wild Things Are (1963) by Maurice Sendak

Developing relationships with others:

Hansel and Gretel (1812) by The Brother's Grimm

Loss and Grief:

The Nightingale (1965) by Hans Christen Andersen

Kindness to Others:

The Three Questions (2002) (Based on a story by Leo Tolstoy) by Jon J. Muth

Awareness and honesty:

The Emperor's New Clothes (1837) by Hans Christian Andersen

Social Problem Solving:

Goldilocks and the Three Bears (1837) by The Brother's Grimm

Positive Self-image:

The Ugly Duckling (1843) by Hans Christian Andersen

You are Special (1997) by Max Lucado



The Tornado Tree

*Written and Illustrated by
Toni Eldith Alpe*

This book is dedicated to my great-aunt, Dorothy Frame, for continuing to tell me our family stories and keeping me connected with Mama and Grandma. I love you all, forever.

Pictured below are my great-grandparents Cordelia and Ross Skipworth, or as we all called them, Mammy and Pappy.



It's been way too long since I've come home.
I can't believe I'm really here.



Walking down the road to the farm brings back such sweet memories of when I was a child playing in the creeks and woods of my Kentucky.

I wonder if the farm still looks the same.



Oh, look; there! There's the Catalpa tree!
And it's in bloom, just like I remember.



Oh, Tree how I've missed you! I just had to come home.

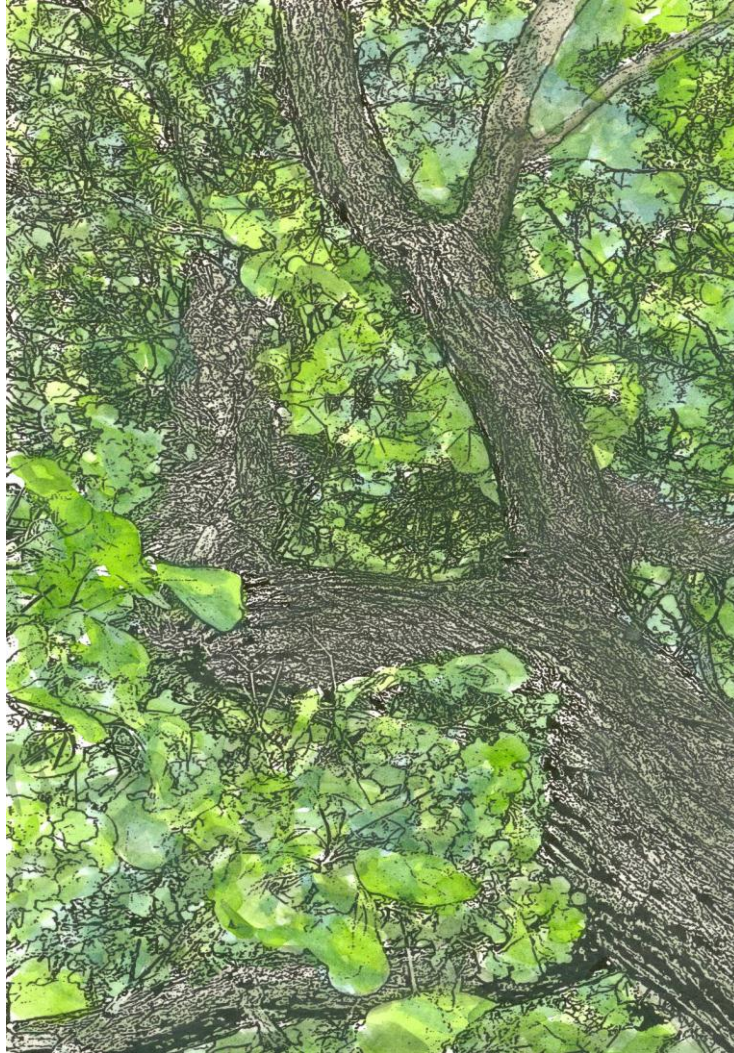
What is it, child?

There have been so many changes in my life lately. It seems like everything is just falling apart. And well, sometimes it feels like if you can just go home, everything will turn out all right.



Well, come here child, come sit in my shade and let me cool you with the breeze that rustling through my leaves.

So, I climbed onto her trunk, so glad to see Tree that I gave her a big hug. Then I laid down, and listened to the honey bees buzzing and humming in the trees fluffy white flowers. I took a deep breath; the air sweet with the flowers perfume. All my worries were carried off as I listened to the soft breeze whispering welcome home to me, as it gently swayed through Tree's branches above my head.



Where have you been child? Why, you're all grown up. Yes ma'am, I am a lot older. But, I will never be too grown up to come home to visit, if that's ok.

Child, child, I hope you never think you're too old to come visit me.

Tree, do you remember when my cousins and I used to pretend you were our house. Your roots that stick out of the ground were our kitchen. We would take the beans you grew, break them up, and pretend to cook them. And your leaves were our plates.

What good memories, I'm so glad I could grow the beans and leaves for ya'll to play with.

And sometimes we would pretend you were a boat and your branches and leaves were the sails. We would travel through shark and alligator infested waters, using your beans as swords when we were invaded by pirates. You always took care of us Tree.

Yes, yes. Child, I never saw children with such imaginations.



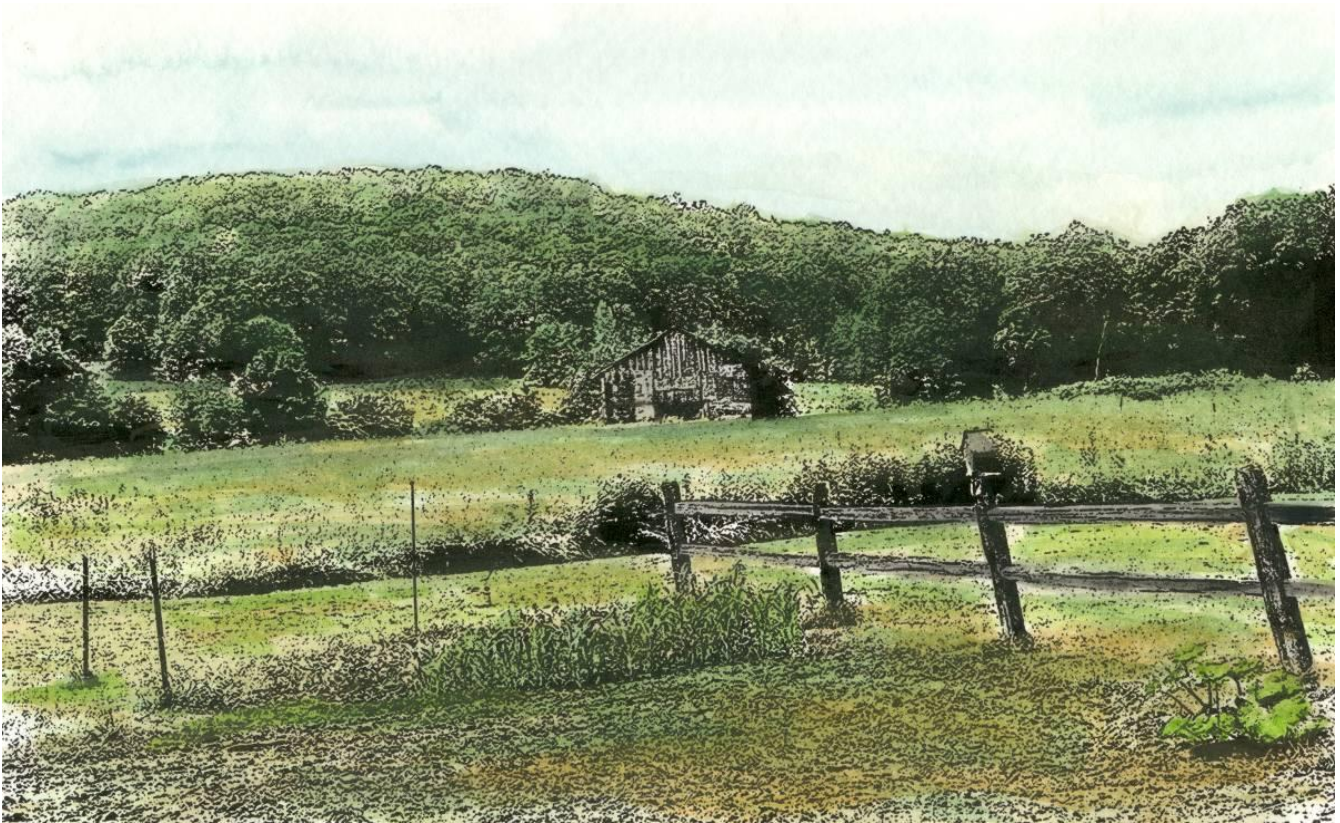
Tree, I've been wondering. How did you become such a wonderful playhouse? Did you grow this way from a little sapling?

Oh, no, child. I used to stand straight and strong and tall. Your great grandparents, Mammy and Pappy, would come and sit in my shade after dinner, in the heat of the day, to cool off before they would go back and do the rest of the days farm work.



Then what happened to you, Tree?

I remember what happened like it was yesterday. It was one afternoon in late springtime, about sunset; Mammy and Pappy had already come in from the fields.



Suddenly, the sky turned dark. There was loud thunder and lots of lightening. The rain came down in sheets. Then the wind started picking up and got very fierce. Pappy came to the front door to look outside and see what was going on. The clouds started swirling around in a spiral, and formed a funnel that came down to the ground. There was no warning! It was a tornado, and it was coming up the road toward the farm!

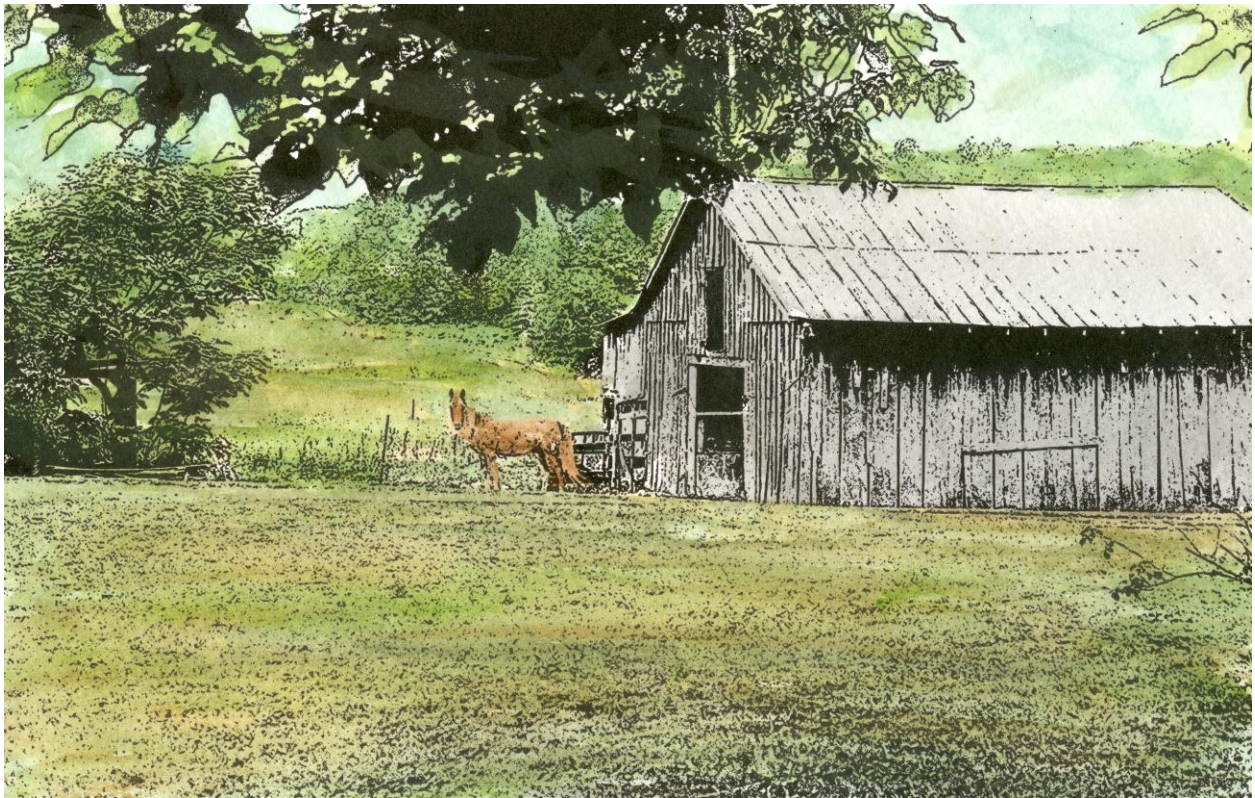
Have mercy Tree! Were you scared?

I sure was scared! Mammy and Pappy did not even have time to run to the root cellar, so Pappy stood in the doorway, and watched as the tornado exploded the barn. The wood and metal roof of the barn went spiraling up into the tornado. Then it spit it out in pieces. The tornado kept coming closer and closer. It took out the corn crib. Then it hit me, right here in the front yard, not 30 feet away from where Pappy stood in the front door of the house. There was nothing I could do but try and hold on. The tornado tried to rip me out of the ground and I fell over on my side!



All of a sudden, just as quick as it came, the tornado was gone.

Pappy came outside to look at all the damage the tornado had done. By some miracle the tornado did not rip all of my roots out of the ground. It did not touch the house, and Mammy and Pappy were not harmed; neither were any of the farm animals.



Did it hurt you badly, Tree?

Well, it broke off most of my smaller branches, and ornery thing blew off all my flowers!

When Pappy came to check on me, he said he was glad the tornado did not kill me. He did not cut off my trunk, or any of my branches, but let me try and figure out how to keep on growing.

Ooh, my roots ached something awful for the longest time after.

Then what happened?

Well, over time I started to heal. My branches became my new trunk growing up to the sky. What roots that I had left I sent as deep as I could into the ground. The worst thing was; I thought I was such a strong tree. I didn't think something like that could ever happen to me.



I think I understand what you mean Tree. But you had to be strong in order to keep growing after being blown over by a tornado. You didn't give up, and because of that all of us children had a wonderful place to play.

Yes, child, that's true. I've been a playhouse for the children of this family for five generations now.

Tree. Thank you for not giving up.

Why child, where would a body go to give up anyway? I recall that your mama used to say "All God's childrens got problems." When those old problems come along, we just have to work on getting through them. Better times always come.

I remember Mama saying that. It's true Tree; our family has never been the kind to give up, no matter what.

